

I am Kevin Roughton, a 13-year veteran of teaching 7th grade World History in California. I am the 2011 Riverside County Teacher of the Year, current California Council for the Social Studies Middle Level Teacher of the Year, and multiple time keynote speaker for social studies conferences and professional development workshops.

I am disgusted at the latest proposed framework. I will speak specifically to my area of expertise and focus on the 7th grade document.

Before that, however, let me make it clear that I feel we teachers have been flat out lied to throughout this process. We were promised, from the beginning, that our new framework would reduce the number of standards so that we could do the deep types of inquiry expected by the Common Core State Standards and which are the key to true history education. An acceptance of the importance of this type of teaching is peppered through the document (see the introduction to Chapter 9, for example) but is then completely undercut by the *addition of multiple new topics* to the 7th grade curriculum. I will also, in general, that the ignorance of the C3 Framework throughout the document is ridiculous. Adding a line stating “Educators may want to consider the College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework, published in 2013 by the National Council for the Social Studies.” (Ch9, lines 10-11) is an insult. It was clearly added to pacify those of us who have worked so hard to make that framework part of our instructional program for our students.

Now, to the 7th grade document in particular.

Issue 1: What is the story here?

History is narrative. Historians tell stories. After reading and reading the 7th grade framework I cannot find the story. I imagine the authors were forced into the ahistorical story of “The sites of encounter of the medieval world have led to our interconnected world of the 20th century” by their decision to adopt the Sites of Encounter materials as their guide. Of course, even that flimsy, ahistorical narrative, does not hold throughout the document.

I ask, what is the story? What is the overarching narrative students with which should leave 7th grade? I won’t insult anyone by pretending the topics were chosen for anything but political reasons. The current standards de-emphasizing of certain cultures (like Japan) in favor of others (like Korea) lack any historical reasoning otherwise. If one were to argue that the goal was create a series of narratives telling the history of relevant nations and populations today they failed even there by continuing to put such great influence on Ghana and Mali. Medieval (and yes, I will use that word) Western Africa had almost no impact on the other civilizations in the framework and about as much today. Eastern Africa would have made a whole lot more sense.

Our past CST made it clear. By making European history worth 50% of the 7th grade portion of the exam the narrative of “Events in history, particularly those in Europe, have greatly influenced the founding of the United States” gave us a clear link to 8th grade U.S. History and relevance to our students’ lives. This one has no clarity of focus whatsoever.

Admittedly, there has never been a coherent story to the 7th grade standards themselves and it was only the CST that gave any real guidance. It has been, at least since 1998, a story that existed solely to include as many social and political groups as possible. Which leads to...

Issue 2: Everyone's story is no one's story.

As implied above, if we try to tell everyone's story for political reasons our kids leave the class knowing almost nothing. There's a reason why the promise of fewer standards was so exciting for us teachers. We believed that, finally, we'd get to teach topics to a level of depth that would leave lasting impressions on students.

Instead, we now have MORE cultures to teach instead of fewer. By adding Mongolia, Persia, India and Sikhism we, by default, water down China, Japan, Islam, Latin America and Europe – which, I'd add, we're already extremely watered down. One simply cannot teach the entire history of the world over a thousand years in 170 days.

Our kids are going to leave with no appreciation of any of these cultures when all they will have time to learn about them are the most basic facts. Maps and governments are not lasting interests for 7th graders which leads to...

Issue 3: Lack of respect and understanding for the middle school mind.

There are tons of lines in the document that are stunningly ignorant but perhaps none more than lines 1477-1484.

While the Reformation was a critically important development in Christianity, other world religions continued to change and spread in this period as well. To reflect this new historiography, this unit focuses on two strands, religion and cultural and intellectual developments, both in the world context. Rewriting of this unit also addresses the problem of teaching abstract concepts to seventh-graders in May and June. It streamlines the content to focus on the most important developments and recommends activities that will engage students as well as challenge them.

Wow. So, first, the writers assume that 7th graders can't understand abstract concepts in May or June. That allows me to assume that the writers then were ineffective teachers at worst or never taught 7th grade at best. My students, from a low performing, economically disadvantage, minority-majority district do very well understanding abstract concepts all year long – including May and June.

Secondly, the implication that understanding the "abstract" concepts of the Reformation is too difficult for students is completely undercut by the addition of even more abstract concepts like Hinduism and Sikhism to the framework. This, in addition, to the existence already of Buddhism (which we teach multiple versions of from Amida to Zen), Islam, animism, Confucianism, Taoism and the various Latin American beliefs, shows that being abstract is not the issue.

Even if it were Catholicism and the Bible is not abstract to my population of students. They, in fact, have more of a concrete connection to this topic than perhaps any all year long. Perhaps the argument is “Well, those aren’t taught in May or June.” I’d remind you that it is *by your very design* that the timing of topics is often decided. If you wanted students to understand the concepts of the Reformation perhaps de-emphasizing it and leaving it at the end of the year was not the solution.

Lastly, the writers imply that if something is too hard to learn, it probably isn’t worth teaching. Which, if accepted as true, leads to...

Issue 4: Sites of Encounter

Using the Sites of Encounter curriculum as the basis for this framework was a poor decision. I’ve followed this curriculum for well over a year now. I keep going back to it hoping to find something useful for my students. I never do. It is not written at a 7th grade level in most cases and includes some ridiculously awful activities. It is 2016 and yet the curriculum REGULARLY ask students to color maps. That is an insult to my students. No student, ever, anywhere has learned anything by coloring a map. There are plenty of other examples of low-level thinking based activities throughout the curriculum. Inquiry, which should be the basis of nearly all we do in social studies (as stated in chapter 9 of your own document) does not show up nearly enough. It appears the lessons were written by college professors who have not been in an actual classroom in years (which is because it was.)

Additionally, this curriculum has furthered the problems with Issues 1 and 2. It presents a false historical narrative that these medieval sites (which we must now fit into our curriculum as well) drove the world to greater interconnectedness. That’s nonsense and any historian knows it. It is revisionism at its very worst. You can argue all you want about the importance of Quanzhou but it doesn’t matter without the people behind it. It is the stories of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta that make history what it is – not the history of these sites chosen not for their historical value but for their value as represents of an ahistorical political idea about globalization.

Which of course leads to...

Issue 5: Goodbye Europe

In a document that goes so far as decry the term “medieval” as Eurocentric (and then goes on to use it 46 times anyway) of course European history is going to be de-emphasized. Calling that a “great historical project” as you do in the document is an insult to historians. European history has “been at the center of world events” because European history is the backbone of the United States. Our nation was founded as a remodeled Roman Republic (which you explicitly instruct me not to teach of course). Our legal system is derived from the great documents of liberties from England. Our ideals of personal responsibility and freedom come largely from the Protestant Reformation.

To argue otherwise is ahistorical. It may not feel good and it may not be politically correct but it is true. We are doing our students, our citizens, and our a nation a grave disservice when we remove instruction about who we are in favor of trying to fit a short story about every group of people who have ever lived.

As mentioned, the previous CST put a heavy weight on European history. Why? Was that test ignorant? Was it not written by the same types of people writing this new framework today? Of course it was. Those people understand that our national influences are primarily (not solely, primarily) European in origin. That origin is worth learning.

On a more direct level more and more districts, including my own, are encouraging their high school students to take AP European History over AP World History. AP World History is extremely difficult because it, like this document, has no real narrative. It might as well be called AP World Trivia. Students attempt to learn a bunch of loosely (if at all) facts and then hope the test asks the ones they remember. We are setting our future AP Euro students up to fail if they have learned almost nothing about Europe until they take that course in 10th grade. This proposed framework is going to hurt their progress and limit their success.

This proposed framework does the impossible. It makes the current, disjointed, messy, unclear and overburdened framework look good. You have failed to create a framework that recognizes the incredible advancements made in history instruction in the last 10 years by groups like the Teacher's Curriculum Institute, the C3 team, and the Stanford Historical Education Group. Instead, you have created a document that ignores pedagogy over ideology and politics over history.

The only way to fix this this monstrosity is to reduce the number of civilizations we are forced to teach to focus on those that are most relevant the success of our students so that we teachers of history can do our jobs and teach depth.

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